United Nations E/2016/NGO/74

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 May 2016

Original: English

2016 session
24 July 2015-27 July 2016
Agenda item 5
High-level segment

Statement submitted by WaterLex, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

16-08765 (E) 030616

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Statement

WaterLex hereby presents this statement on sustainable and adapted sanitation infrastructures as pre-conditions for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Water is at the core of sustainable development. It is also the first resource impacted by climate change which is exacerbating other environmental and social problems that threaten the development of economies and people's livelihoods. In addition to increasing climate-induced water stress and flood risk, the major threats for human well-being are in fact due to the decline of water quality; as a consequence of human activities which are contaminating surface water and groundwater reservoirs with toxic chemicals and microbial pathogens which are known to cause gastrointestinal issues such as diarrhea.

Investment in sustainable and adapted sanitation infrastructures not only contributes to protecting the environment, but also improves the health and the economy of the populations. In addition to a crucial need for a better understanding of how climate change will affect regional water cycle, water resources need to be, and can be, protected against contamination by domestic and industrial effluents. This is particularly important following heavy precipitation and other runoff events which can lead to the overflow of septic tanks and treatment basins or to sewer systems obstruction — which in turn cause sanitation and health crises.

The most effective and sustainable sanitation infrastructure public policy measures to reduce sanitation vulnerability are programs that combine natural and traditional robust water and sanitation infrastructures. Further, best policy practices include measures which further stretch the disaster response capacities from traditionally urban contexts at the watershed scales to create inter-sectoral benefits. For instance, domestic wastewater and sludge can provide the required quantities of water and of major plant nutrients for agriculture and aquaculture practices, ensuring sustainable and local food supply and reducing the pressure on available freshwater resources. In this context, attention should be given to national water regulatory frameworks which do not sufficiently support water re-use opportunities.

Last but not least, in addition to the technical aspects, there are other factors that need to be addressed directly when designing and pursuing a model of sustainable sanitation, such as the capacity of communities and institutions to manage systems, and the coordination between different sectors (health, environment, land planning) and partners (public, ministers and private companies). These social dialog components become key success factors in order to solve local problems using national institutional and financial responses. Therefore, successful sanitation infrastructure programmes have made an explicit effort to taking into account the views and needs of the populations concerned, including urban poor communities and people living in informal settlements. The human rights-based approach to water and sanitation governance is recommended for the inclusive design of sustainable policies, programmes and infrastructure.

WaterLex, as a member of the United Nations Environment Programme Global Wastewater Initiative, supports and assists governmental authorities in the design of inclusive policies and regulatory frameworks to scale-up wastewater treatment and reuse to achieve sustainable water management and governance.